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SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR WHA/CAR (ACADIEUX) (VDEPIRRO) (WSMITH)
WHA/EPSC (MROONEY) (FCORNEILLE)
SANTO DOMINGO FOR FCS AND FAS
TREASURY FOR ERIN NEPHEW

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: JAMAICAN ECONOMIC CONDITIONS: THE VIEW FROM A VISA WINDOW

SUMMARY

¶11. (SBU) The Consular Section offers a unique perspective on economic patterns and sheds light on the individual economic situations of average Jamaicans. As seen from the perspective of a visa window, the economic situation of most Jamaicans appears tenuous and inconsistent, reflected in part in the high volume of fraudulent documents with respect to employment situations. Often applicants misrepresent their job, position, and salary to the interviewing officer, so it is difficult to obtain an accurate assessment of an applicant's job status and income level. Although Jamaica lies in close proximity to the U.S. and there are frequent flights, the cost of a trip is often equivalent to one month's salary, even for Jamaicans earning higher salaries. Post expects to see an increase in our refusal rate and the use of fraudulent documents through the international economic downturn. END SUMMARY.

Average Monthly Salary

¶12. (SBU) More than half of the nonimmigrant visa (NIV) applicants make less than USD 1,000 per month in a country in which the annual per capita income is near USD 3,800. Over the past three months, the refusal rate for Jamaican visitor's visas was 43 percent (up from 37 percent for the same period last year). For many of those approved for a visa, the cost of a trip to the U.S. equals about one month's salary. Many applicants intend to stay with family members who live in the United States, so there are no hotel expenses associated with their travel. Flights to the U.S. are regularly under USD 300.

Type of Work

¶13. (SBU) Many of visa applicants are self-employed, usually in small businesses of less than five employees that are either street vendor operations or home-based businesses. Common occupations for the self-employed include: small restaurants, bars, hair salons, dress making shops, and craft making stores. It is difficult to determine accurately the annual income for these businesses, as many are not formally registered and most do not pay annual income taxes. Thus, they do not have reliable revenue or tax payment records.

¶14. (SBU) Many applicants are unlikely to qualify for a U.S. visa without previous travel and evidence of other financial resources because they appear to need jobs in the United States to supplement their incomes. Workers in the tourism industry account for a large portion of the applicants interviewed; the majority of these applicants are housekeepers, cooks, and receptionists who make between USD 500 and USD 800 per month. Turnover in the sector is also very high. Of those from this sector who are issued visas, most work in hotels and restaurants at the managerial level, often

making USD 1,500 per month on average. The worsening economic situation in Jamaica because of the global economic crisis raises greater concerns over those with transportable job skills seeking to work illegally in the United States. COMMENT: The Jamaican Ministry of Labor does not survey wages and salary information, making it difficult to accurately assess average incomes. END COMMENT.

15. (SBU) Jamaicans who work in the public sector have more stable jobs, but lower salaries. Elementary and Secondary school teachers make between USD 200 to USD 700 per month, depending on the grade level taught and the education level of the teacher. College and University educators earn between USD 1,000 and USD 2,000 per month.

The Jamaican military and the large bauxite and mining firms tend to employ people for a full career. While average salaries in these jobs are still under USD 1,500 per month, employees will usually stay with the same organization until retirement.

Fraud Trends

16. (SBU) Fraud is most commonly found with applicants in entertainment groups and sports teams. There are often additional applicants who apply with a larger group of performers or athletes who have no role in the performances or competitions.

Misrepresentation is very common and job letters are often false or misleading. In general, job letters are not reliable, as there are many document vendors who have turned false job related documents into a cottage industry.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) Taking the global economic crisis into consideration, Post expects that the employment situation will worsen. Rising unemployment and weaker individual economic situations in Jamaica will likely result in higher refusal rates. Post also expect an increase in the use of fraudulent documents as applicants attempt to disguise low wages or unemployment.

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